

DECISION MEMO

Mountain Bike Trail Construction

**USDA Forest Service
National Forests in Alabama
Talladega National Forest- Talladega Ranger District
Talladega County, Alabama**

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

The Forest Service entered into a partnership with the City of Sylacauga to enhance and promote recreational opportunities in the Lake Howard area in Talladega County, Alabama. The land around Lake Howard is owned by the City of the Sylacauga and the National Forest. The city contracted Auburn University to conduct a market research analysis that determined public need for a mountain bicycle trail in the area. The city's Mayor approached the Talladega District Ranger and requested entering into a partnership to build this mountain bike trail partially on city property and extend the trail around Lake Howard onto the National Forest. Under a challenge cost share agreement the city proposed to pay the cost of construction. The City developed an agreement to maintain the trail with the local mountain bike club. The City of Sylacauga and volunteer groups have agreed to build, operate and maintain the trail under Forest Service direction and regulation.

The trail will be a loop approximately 13 miles in length. The project area is located in Section 13 of Township 21 South, Range 4 East. The project area is located east of downtown Sylacauga and west of Lake Tallasaehatchee. The area can be accessed approximately 2 ¾ miles from the intersection of Alabama Highway 21 and Highway 148, off of Forest Service Road 601. A vicinity map is attached.

THE DECISION:

I have decided to work in partnership with the city of Sylacauga to construct a trail for mountain bicycle use on the Talladega Ranger District.

The trail will be constructed using Sweco type equipment (small dozer) and hand-tools. The finished trail will be approximately 48 inches wide and the grade will average 3 to 5% with short sections from 8% to 15%. Arched culverts would be installed and one trail bridge for crossing intermittent drainages to prevent the bicycle trail from causing sedimentation. The trail will be signed following appropriate forest service direction. A trail head or parking lot facilities will not be built on National Forest lands at this time. A trail

head and parking lot will be located on City of Sylacauga property and is under the administration of the City. The trail head will be open to the general public.

The trail will be going through managed forest where the visitors will experience tree harvesting, prescribed burning and other silvicultural activities as well as the full range of existing public uses, hiking, hunting and fishing. Forest management in the vicinity of the trail is guided by prescriptions that direct the restoration of the longleaf pine / fire ecosystem. This forest will become suitable habitat for the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker.

This action is categorically excluded from documentation in an EIS or EA because it is consistent with Forest Service Handbook 1909.15-2004-3, Section 31.2, Category 1: “*Construction and reconstruction of trails*”.

The action is constructing a trail.

I find that no extraordinary circumstances exist as defined in FSH 1909.15, 30.3.2.

1. *Federally listed Threatened and Endangered Species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species* - No federally listed threatened or endangered species, designated critical habitat, species proposed for federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species are present on the project site. In accordance with FSM 2672.4, a Biological Evaluation (BE) was prepared to evaluate the effect of the planned activities on proposed, endangered and threatened (PET) species and designated critical habitat. The proposed actions would have “no effect” and “not likely to adversely affect” PET species or designated critical habitat. The Fish and Wildlife Service concurred with the findings on BE findings in an email dated October 2, 2007. The BE determined proposed actions will have “no impact” or “may impact individuals but not likely to cause a trend to federal listing or a loss of viability” for regional forester’s sensitive species.
2. *Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds* – The proposed action is not in a floodplain or wetland. The trail is within a municipal watershed. Forest plan standards and construction guidelines will be implemented, and given the minimal scope of trail impacts will mean that no adverse impacts will occur to the watershed.
3. *Congressionally Designated Areas* – No congressionally designated areas are within the project area.
4. *Inventoried Roadless areas, Research natural Areas* – No part of the project area is designated as inventoried roadless area or research natural area.

5. *Research natural areas* - There are no research natural areas on the Talladega Ranger District.
6. *American Indians and Alaska native religious or cultural sites/Archaeological sites or historic areas* – In consultation with the Alabama State Historic Preservation Officer, (SHPO) and interested Tribal Historic Preservation Officers (THPO), a heritage resource survey of the project area was conducted. One archaeological site was identified 72 meters from the proposed trail route. Upon review of the survey report, SHPO, concurred with the project activities provided this site was avoided during construction and the trail monitored. No other American Indian or Alaska Native religious or cultural sites were on record or found.

My decision is based on an analysis of the situation and this action is consistent with these goals and objectives and a determination that the cited categorical exclusion was applicable in the absence of adverse impacts or extraordinary circumstances.

PUBLIC INVOLVMENT AND SCOPING

A public notice was published in the paper of record, the *Talladega Daily Home*, on July 13, 2007. A scoping notice was mailed to the Districts mailing list on July 6, 2007. A 30 day comment period was given to the public. Two comments were received. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) sent a form letter that stated sensitive plant species are known to occur on the District and the fine-lined pocketbook is known to occur in streams of Tallasahatchee Creek watershed. The District and Forest Fisheries Biologist prepared a biological evaluation (BE) that addressed effects on these species and sent the document to the FWS for concurrence. The determination in the BE was “no effect” to the species and the FWS concurred with the analysis and findings.

The District interdisciplinary team reviewed the proposed action and project location and found no extraordinary circumstances.

Finding Required by Other Laws:

Revised Land and Resource Management Plan - The actions of this project are consistent with the direction outlined in the Revised Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP), which provides standards to provide a wide variety of dispersed and developed recreation opportunities within the capabilities of the land; annually evaluate existing opportunities to determine if they meet carrying capacity, demand, and financial ability to maintain in the future for maintenance, expansion or closure; and recreation induced impacts to highly sensitive components of the ecosystem will be analyzed and mitigated as needed. The forest wide goals, objectives and standards are outlined in Chapter II, Goals 22, 23 & 24. Planned trail grades, width and drainage crossings are within the limitations specified in the LRMP, it provides for adequate protection of soil, water and other physical resources, and it utilizes best science to protect and insure habitat for wildlife and plant species.

This proposed trail is located within the area managed under Management Prescription 8.D.1, Red-cockaded woodpecker (RCW) Management Area as outlined in the Revised Forest Land and Resource Management Plan. This management prescription (8.D.1) is designed to provide habitat conditions for the endangered RCW and RCW management will be evident along this section of the trail. Because management for RCW includes timber harvests and prescribed burning, these activities will occur along the trail, within the trail corridor and in the foreground and are compatible with management of this section of the trail.

IMPLEMENTATION AND REVIEW

This decision, pursuant to 36 CFR 215 is not subject to appeal and may be implemented immediately upon publication of the Notice of Decision in the paper of record.

CONTACTS

For additional information concerning this decision contact Lesley Hodge, 45 Highway 281, Heflin, AL; phone (256) 463-2273.

_____/s/ Kent Evans_____
KENT EVANS
District Ranger
Talladega Ranger District
National Forests in Alabama

____10/17/07_____
DATE